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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 06 BUENOS AIRES 000304

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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: RESPONSE TO DOL LIST OF GOODS BELIEVED TO BE
MADE WITH FORCED OR CHILD LABOR

REF: A. STATE 16596

[1B.](#) STATE 1730

[1C.](#) BUENOS AIRES 0048

[1D.](#) 2/24/09 Castro-Gomez e-mail

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¶1. THIS CABLE IS SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED. NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRIBUTION.

¶2. This is an action request. See para 3.

SUMMARY/COMMENT

¶3. (SBU) Below please find post's response to ref A's request for additional information on the Department of Labor's list of goods believed to be made with forced or child labor. Embassy queried the International Labor Organization (ILO), GOA, and NGO contacts for specific examples to back up claims of child and forced labor and found that their allegations are based on very few specific cases. ILO also praised cooperative public-private programs underway to eliminate child labor. Based on our conversation with the ILO, post recommends that lemons should be removed from the list, as the overwhelming majority of the lemon harvest has been certified as free of forced and child labor for export to the EU. According to our agro-industry contacts, sugar should also be taken off of the list, since the industry is highly mechanized. As noted earlier, Post requests that the Department of Labor not cite the Embassy as a source when publishing its list, given host government sensitivities to this reporting. The public sources cited in ref D should be used instead as post deems them more authoritative. In addition, post would appreciate the Department of Labor providing advanced notification of the list's publication along with press guidance to use locally.

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¶4. (SBU) We are also concerned that publication of the list as currently envisioned will be counterproductive, reinforcing deeply ingrained Argentine views about U.S. unilateralism and didacticism and provoking the GOA into a counterproductive withdrawal of its cooperation with us on the eradication of forced and child labor. Prior to the publication of this list, we believe that the interagency community should consider whether this new round of diplomacy by report card is truly effective in reaching our goal of a world free of forced and child labor. Instead of singling out developing countries like Argentina for problems they are trying to address, the USG should take steps to increase significantly bilateral assistance to strengthen efforts to combat the problem. Even if we need to publish such a list, we should 1) find a way to recognize efforts governments are making to end these practices; and 2) offer assistance programs to willing governments. Absent this, we may well just perpetuate the image of a nagging, rich Uncle Sam who is unwilling to really help fix the problem. End
Summary/Comment.

AGRO-INDUSTRY CONTACTS: CHILD LABOR OCCURS BUT OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL HOURS

¶5. (SBU) In reviewing the sources found in ref D, we noted that the sources indicated a significant incidence of child labor in agricultural production including: yerba, garlic, blueberries, cotton, grapes, lemons, olives, sugar, strawberries, tobacco, and tomatoes. According to agro-industry contacts, children in rural areas of Argentina are involved in the production and harvesting of many crops, but it is questionable whether that involvement should be considered significant, or whether it should be considered child labor. These contacts maintain that many children work in the harvest alongside their families outside of school hours or during their summer vacation, much like many children in the United States

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have done for decades. In particular, sugar industry contacts assert that child labor is not a problem in their industry, as 85 percent of the sugar harvest is fully mechanized, 14 percent is semi-mechanized, and only one percent is fully manual.

ILO: SIGNIFICANT INCIDENCE OF CHILD LABOR IN AG SECTOR

¶ 16. (SBU) ILO official Gustavo Ponce, however, maintains that child labor is prevalent in the production of most agricultural goods, although he acknowledged that there are no comprehensive statistics on the matter. Embassy notes that ILO, GOA (which only admits to the incidence of child labor in the tomato and strawberry industries), and NGO claims of child and forced labor are based on very few specific cases and lack credible, serious substantiation. Post is pressing these organizations for specific examples to back up their allegations. Ponce explained that in the ILO's work to prevent and eradicate child labor with the Argentine Ministry of Labor's National Commission to Eradicate Child Labor (CONAETI) and its provincial counterparts (COPRETIS), many COPRETIS have conducted field studies to determine the incidence of child labor in agricultural production. Although these studies have not quantified the number of child laborers working in a particular industry, they have found that a significant amount of child labor takes place in the production of bricks and the agricultural goods listed in ref D. Ponce said, however, that there was not a significant incidence of child labor in lemons, since the overwhelming majority of the lemon harvest has been certified as free of forced and child labor as a condition of their export to the European Union.

¶ 17. (SBU) Ponce claimed that child laborers worked for farms owned by third parties during school hours. He mentioned that part of the reason why children worked on these farms is because the agricultural sector pays by the bushel instead of per hour, thus

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creating an incentive for an entire family, including children, to assist with the harvest. He also mentioned that many of the people who work on these farms are migrant laborers with few social resources in the communities where they work that would enable them to drop off their children with relatives or friends for childcare. As a result, these families choose to bring their children to the farms where they put them to work. Ponce also noted a widespread social and cultural acceptance of child labor in certain regional agricultural economies. He claimed that in Jujuy province (which borders Bolivia in the northwest of Argentina), they've encountered cases where teachers were marking children as "present" when in fact, the children were working on the harvest.

ILO PRAISES GOA EFFORTS TO ERADICATE CHILD LABOR

¶ 18. (SBU) Ponce noted the excellent ongoing cooperation between the ILO, CONAETI, and the COPRETIS. He praised CONAETI's public-private partnership to advance policies to eliminate child labor. Established in 2007, the Corporate Network for the Eradication of Child Labor includes 63 prominent Argentine companies, including the tobacco and cotton chambers of industry. The Network, along with CONAETI and the Ministry of Labor, meet every two months to discuss its development plan. In November 2008, CONAETI, the Ministry of Labor, and the Network organized a conference on "The Role of the Media in the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor." The ILO is presenting the initiative as a best practice in an upcoming regional conference in Uruguay in the hopes of implementing the initiative elsewhere in the region. More information can be found at:
<http://www.trabajo.gov.ar/conaeti/institucional/infantil.htm>

Other public-private initiatives include ILO's efforts to work with

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the tobacco industry to offer training to employees on how to identify and prevent child labor.

¶ 19. (SBU) Ponce also described as positive a CONAETI/Ministry of Education initiative to provide scholarships to reintegrate children who have dropped out of school to work, and supports children who work and attend school. The program also provides children's parents with job-search assistance and job training. In 2008, 5,000

children and adolescents received scholarships. Labor inspectors have referred another 29,000 children and adolescents to the program. CONAETI indicates that these children are in the process of receiving scholarships for the next school year. More information on the program can be found at:
<http://www.me.gov.ar/todosaestudiar/>

COMMENT: MORE CARROTS, LESS STICKS

¶10. (SBU) The GOA continues to work towards the eradication of child and forced labor. Post is concerned that publication of this list will provoke a counterproductive reaction from the GOA. Our public reports on a broad range of issues have reinforced the view here among the Argentine public that the USG sets itself up unilaterally as police officer, judge, and jury on GOA conduct and that, however much Argentines try, their best is never good enough for us. At best, the list's publication will elicit an angry public response by the GOA. At worst, it may provoke official resistance to our efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation in this area. Prior to the publication of this list, the interagency community should consider seriously whether this new round of diplomacy by report card is truly effective in reaching our goal of a world free of forced and child labor. Instead of singling out countries like Argentina for problems they are trying to address, the USG should consider seriously redoubling bilateral assistance to strengthen efforts to combat the problem. We should also find ways to include

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praise for governments with active programs that are trying to eliminate forced and child labor, even with the limited resources available to them. Post welcomes learning what plans DOL may have to provide bilateral assistance to governments who are trying to fight forced and child labor. We look forward to hearing views from our colleagues at other posts.

WAYNE